

# Storm Spotters

Storm spotters play a vital role in the warning system. They come from all walks of life, joined by their interests in weather and community service. Spotters are associated with SKYWARN, a volunteer program developed by the National Weather Service (NWS), to train and organize spotters. Spotters are coordinated with local emergency management agencies, amateur radio clubs, personnel from fire departments, rescue squads, law enforcement agencies, and public participants.

Spotters are critical because they provide timely information on the actual weather that is occurring at or near the ground. This information is known as ground truth. Satellite imagery and Doppler radar provide NWS meteorologists with large amounts of information about storm structure, but not on the actual weather occurring at or near the ground. This is where spotters become the eyes and ears for their communities. This ground truth combined with radar and satellite data is used during the warning decision process. With early warning, lives can be saved.

Storm spotters go through training provided by the NWS to gain an understanding of thunderstorm structure, exposure to visual clues, tornado safety, and procedures for reporting information.



Warning Coordination Meteorologist Tim Troutman presents a Storm Spotter Class.



The amateur radio operation area inside the National Weather Service

ALERT - The Alabama Emergency Response Team, is an organization of amateur radio operators from throughout Birmingham and central Alabama. ALERT is dedicated to providing emergency communication services using amateur radio to National Weather Service Forecast Offices. Communication of critical storm spotter reports often falls to this group because of their willingness and commitment to use their radios when conventional power and communication methods are knocked out by severe weather. NWS offices across the state have established working relationships with the amateur radio community by including radio equipment in the offices, for ALERT members to communicate with spotters during rapidly changing and dangerous weather situations.

More information on storm spotter activities can be found on the NWS internet web sites. For information on amateur radio, visit [www.alert-alabama.org](http://www.alert-alabama.org).

Assisting the educational effort to prepare Alabamians for severe weather, the Alabama SKYWARN Foundation is a non-profit organization established to provide local help to the NWS in promoting statewide weather education. Education and advance preparedness are key elements to keeping deaths and injuries to a minimum. When we understand the dangers Alabama weather brings and the safety precautions needed when the weather threatens, people in Alabama can respond quickly in the face of danger.

The Alabama SKYWARN Foundation relies on tax deductible donations to underwrite the costs of producing and distributing weather-related educational material. The Foundation is pleased to have the help of such wonderful groups as Mercedes-Benz International, Russell Corporation, Jim Walter Resources, Black Warrior Methane, Jefferson County Citizens Corps Council and Emergency Management Agency, Alabama Emergency Management Agency, and the American Red Cross Birmingham Chapter for their direct support in making this annual publication possible.

The Foundation hopes that with your support additional efforts can be undertaken to improve severe weather safety and awareness across our great state. More information about the Foundation can be found at [www.alabamaskywarn.org](http://www.alabamaskywarn.org).

